

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

*Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge
Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge*

September 2007

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Contents

<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Summary</i>	<i>vii</i>
1 Introduction	1
Purpose and Need for the Plan.....	1
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System	3
National and Regional Mandates	4
Refuge Contributions to National and Regional Plans.....	4
Ecosystem Descriptions and Threats.....	6
The Planning Process.....	6
2 The Refuges	11
Establishment, Acquisition, and Management History.....	11
Special Values of the Refuges	12
Purpose.....	14
Vision	14
Goals.....	14
Planning Issues	17
3 Refuge Resources and Description	19
Physical Environment.....	19
Biological Resources.....	21
Cultural Resources	34
Special Management Areas	37
Visitor Services	40
Partnerships	41
Socioeconomic Environment	41
Refuge Operations	44
4 Management Direction	45
Management Focus.....	45
Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Rationale.....	46
Staffing and Funding.....	54
Step-down Management Plans	55
Monitoring and Evaluation.....	55
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>57</i>
Appendix A—Environmental Compliance.....	63
Appendix B—Key Legislation and Policies.....	65
Appendix C—List of Preparers.....	69
Appendix D—Public Involvement	71
Appendix E—Fire Management Program	77
Appendix F—List of Plant Species.....	81
Appendix G—List of Potentially Occurring Bird Species	85
Appendix H—List of Potentially Occurring Amphibian and Reptile Species	89
Appendix I—List of Potentially Occurring Mammal Species.....	91
Appendix J—Compatibility Determination for Wildlife Observation and Wildlife Photography	93
Appendix K—Compatibility Determination for Environmental Education and Interpretation	95
Appendix L—Compatibility Determination for Grazing.....	97
Appendix M—Section 7 Biological Evaluation.....	99
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>105</i>

Figures and Tables

Figures

1. Vicinity map for the Laramie Plains refuges, Wyoming.....	2
2. The Laramie Plains refuges are located in the Wyoming Basin, physiographic area 86.....	5
3. Platte–Kansas Rivers ecosystem.....	7
4. The planning process.....	8
5. Base map of Bamforth NWR, Wyoming.....	13
6. Base map of Hutton Lake NWR, Wyoming.....	15
7. Base map of Mortenson Lake NWR, Wyoming.....	16
8. Habitats at Bamforth NWR, Wyoming.....	24
9. Habitats at Hutton Lake NWR, Wyoming.....	25
10. Habitats at Mortenson Lake NWR, Wyoming.....	26
11. Infrastructure at Bamforth NWR, Wyoming.....	29
12. Infrastructure and public use areas at Hutton Lake NWR, Wyoming.....	38
13. Infrastructure at Mortenson Lake NWR, Wyoming.....	39
14. Laramie Plains refuges in relation to nearby centers of economic influence.....	41
15. Wyoming and study area population.....	42
16. Study area age composition.....	42
17. Study area employment distribution, 2006.....	43
18. The adaptive management process.....	56

Tables

1. Planning process summary for the Laramie Plains refuges, Wyoming.....	10
2. Water rights for the Laramie Plains refuges, Wyoming.....	22
3. Documented occurrences of vertebrate species of concern within the Laramie Plains refuges, Wyoming.....	35
4. Current and proposed staff for the Arapaho NWR Complex, including Arapaho NWR, Colorado, and Bamforth NWR, Hutton Lake NWR, Mortenson Lake NWR, and Pathfinder NWR, Wyoming.....	55
5. Step-down management plans for the Laramie Plains refuges, Wyoming.....	56

Abbreviations

Administration Act	National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966
ABC	American Bird Conservancy
BBS	breeding bird survey
BCR	Bird Conservation Regions
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
CCP	comprehensive conservation plan
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
cfs	cubic feet per second
CRP	conservation reserve program
CWCS	comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy
DNC	dense nesting cover
DU	Ducks Unlimited
EA	environmental assessment
EO	executive order
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FMP	fire management plan
FONSI	finding of no significant impact
FTE	full-time equivalent
GIS	geographic information system
GPS	global positioning system
GS	general schedule (employment)
HAPET	Habitat and Population Evaluation Team
HMP	habitat management plan
IMPROVE	interagency monitoring of protected visual environments
Improvement Act	National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
LPP	land protection plan
NABCI	North American Bird Conservation Initiative
NAWCA	North American Wetlands Conservation Act
NAWMP	North American Waterfowl Management Plan
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NOI	notice of intent

NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWI	national wetland inventory
NWR	national wildlife refuge
NWRS	National Wildlife Refuge System
PFW	Partners for Fish and Wildlife
PL	public law
PPJV	Prairie Pothole Joint Venture
PPR	prairie pothole region
Refuge System	National Wildlife Refuge System
region 6	Mountain–Prairie Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
RONs	Refuge Operating Needs System
SAMMS	Service Asset Maintenance Management System
Service	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
SUP	special use permit
SWG	state wildlife grant
TMDL	total maximum daily load
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UGHEP	upland gamebird habitat enhancement program
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WG	wage grade (employment)
WHIP	wildlife habitat incentive program
WPA	waterfowl production area
WMD	wetland management district
WUI	wildland–urban interface

Summary

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed this comprehensive conservation plan as the foundation for management and use of the three Laramie Plains refuges (Bamforth, Hutton Lake, and Mortenson Lake) located in Albany County, Wyoming. This plan, approved in 2007, will guide management of the refuges for the next 15 years.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) requires the Service to develop a comprehensive conservation plan by 2012 for each national wildlife refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

This brief summary describes the refuges, comprehensive conservation plan, and planning process.

THE LARAMIE PLAINS REFUGES

Laramie, Wyoming, is positioned in a high plains basin ecosystem known as the Laramie Basin. The shallow depressions of the basin, within the relatively flat topography of the region, support wetland complexes that are unique to the area. These wetland complexes provide resting, nesting, and breeding areas for migratory birds in the semiarid environment.

The Laramie Basin is home to three national wildlife refuges known collectively as the “Laramie Plains refuges.” Located within 15 miles of Laramie, the three refuges are managed by Service staff headquartered at the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) near Walden, Colorado, which lies approximately 65 miles southwest of Laramie.

In the early 1930s, J. Clark Salyer III was charged with identifying areas to protect as national wildlife refuges for migratory birds. He surveyed the area around Laramie and selected two locations as national wildlife refuges for migratory birds. Bamforth NWR and Hutton Lake NWR were established by executive orders in 1932, within one day of each other.

Bamforth NWR comprises three separate parcels with private or state lands between them. The 1,166-acre refuge contains Bamforth Lake, but most of the lake falls outside the refuge boundary. No public use is allowed on Bamforth NWR.

Hutton Lake NWR consists of 1,928 acres and supports approximately 2,000 visits over the course of a year, mostly from March through October. Wildlife-viewing opportunities and refuge access are limited from November through February due to frozen ponds and cold, snowy weather.

Mortenson Lake NWR was established in 1993 to protect the Wyoming toad’s last known population. The Wyoming toad was listed as an endangered species in 1984. Physical features of 1,968-acre refuge include Mortenson Lake, Soda Lake, and Gibbs Pond. Habitat types include open water, wetlands, wet meadow, grassland, sagebrush, and greasewood communities. No public use is currently allowed on the refuge to prevent potential adverse impact on the Wyoming toad.



Refuge habitats include wet meadows and grasslands.

USFWS

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Through the environmental analysis process, the Service has selected as the preferred alternative (final comprehensive conservation plan) for the Laramie Plains refuges alternative B from the draft conservation plan and environmental assessment published in August 2007.

In 2006, a planning team of refuge and other Service staff gathered and began to analyze resource information. The planning process included designing a vision for the three refuges, along with goals to reach the vision. After identifying key issues related to achieving the vision, the team developed management alternatives.

The team invited the public to participate in the planning process and public scoping. A mailing list of about 165 names was created and included private citizens; local, regional, and state government representatives and legislators; other federal agencies; tribal governments; and nonprofit organizations.

Key issues (habitat, wildlife, water quality, public outreach, public use, and refuge operations) were identified during analysis of concerns raised by

refuge staff, along with analysis of public comments collected during scoping. These issues were addressed throughout the planning process and in the final comprehensive conservation plan.

COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN

This plan includes detailed objectives and strategies to carry out the vision and goals for the Laramie Plains refuges.

The below vision describes what the refuges will be and what the Service hopes to do, and is based primarily on the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and specific purposes of the refuges.

Vision

The wetland complexes and uplands of the Laramie Plains refuges are important resource components of this semiarid region that provide key habitat for the Wyoming toad, migratory birds, and resident wildlife.

The refuges will be evaluated to direct management decisions to provide natural and enhanced habitat,



Bulrushes.

thereby maximizing the unique potential of each refuge. Wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities will be evaluated for each refuge to determine potential, appropriate public use opportunities.

Goals

The following goals will direct work toward achieving the vision for the Laramie Plains refuges.

Research and Science Goal

Conduct natural resource management using sound science and applied research to advance the understanding of refuge resources and natural resource function.

(Applies to all three Laramie Plains refuges.)

Partnerships Goal

Work with partners to determine the wildlife and habitat resources on the refuges, to maximize wildlife habitat protection, and to increase understanding of wildlife needs, as well as the benefits wildlife offer to individuals and communities, on and off the refuges.

(Applies to all three Laramie Plains refuges.)

Cultural Resources Goal

Identify and evaluate the cultural resources on the refuges and protect those that are determined to be significant.

(Applies to all three Laramie Plains refuges.)

Refuge Operations Goal

Secure and demonstrate the effective use of funding, staffing, and partnerships for the benefit of all resources in support of the refuges and the Refuge System.

(Applies to all three Laramie Plains refuges.)

Natural Resources Goal

Conduct baseline surveys to identify refuge resources and the role these resources serve in the Laramie Basin ecosystem and the Refuge System.

(Applies only to Bamforth NWR.)

Wetlands Goal

Manage refuge impoundments and other wetlands to create diverse habitat for wetland-dependent wildlife.

(Applies only to Hutton Lake NWR and Mortenson Lake NWR.)

Uplands Goal

Evaluate and manage shrub- and grass-dominated uplands for benefits to migratory birds (willet, horned lark), white-tailed prairie dogs, pronghorn, and other wildlife.

(Applies only to Hutton Lake NWR and Mortenson Lake NWR.)

Visitor Services Goal

Provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to a diverse audience when the administration of these programs does not adversely affect habitat management objectives.

(Applies only to Hutton Lake NWR.)

Wyoming Toad Goal

In conjunction with the Wyoming Toad Recovery Team, manage refuge lands around Mortenson Lake and other areas on the refuge as necessary to protect, create, and manage habitat suitable for Wyoming toad recovery from endangered status.

(Applies only to Mortenson Lake NWR.)

1 Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has developed this comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) to provide a foundation for the management and use of the three national wildlife refuges located in southeast Wyoming near the town of Laramie (figure 1).

The CCP is intended to be a working guide for management programs and actions over the next 15 years for the three refuges known collectively as the “Laramie Plains refuges”: Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Hutton Lake NWR, and Mortenson Lake NWR.

The Service developed this CCP in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act) and Part 602 (National Wildlife Refuge System Planning) of “The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.” The actions described in this CCP also meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Compliance with the NEPA is being achieved through involvement of the public and inclusion of an integrated environmental assessment (EA) in the previous draft document (see environmental compliance documents in appendix A).



Yellow-headed blackbird.

USFWS

The CCP specifies the necessary actions to achieve the vision and purposes of refuges. Wildlife is the first priority in refuge management; public use (wildlife-dependent recreation) is allowed and encouraged, as long as it is compatible with the refuges’ purposes.

A planning team of representatives from various Service programs, refuge staff, the Wyoming Toad Recovery Team, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department prepared the CCP. In developing this plan, the team used input from local citizens and organizations.

The evaluation of management alternatives for the refuges was documented in the “Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment—Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge, Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge.” In September 2007, the regional director of region 6 of the Service selected alternative B as the preferred alternative for the CCP for the Laramie Plains refuges.

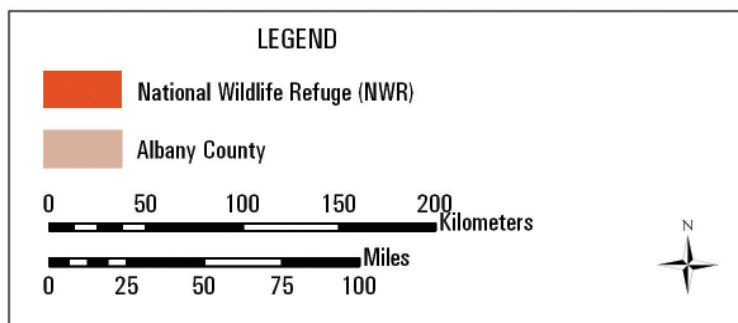
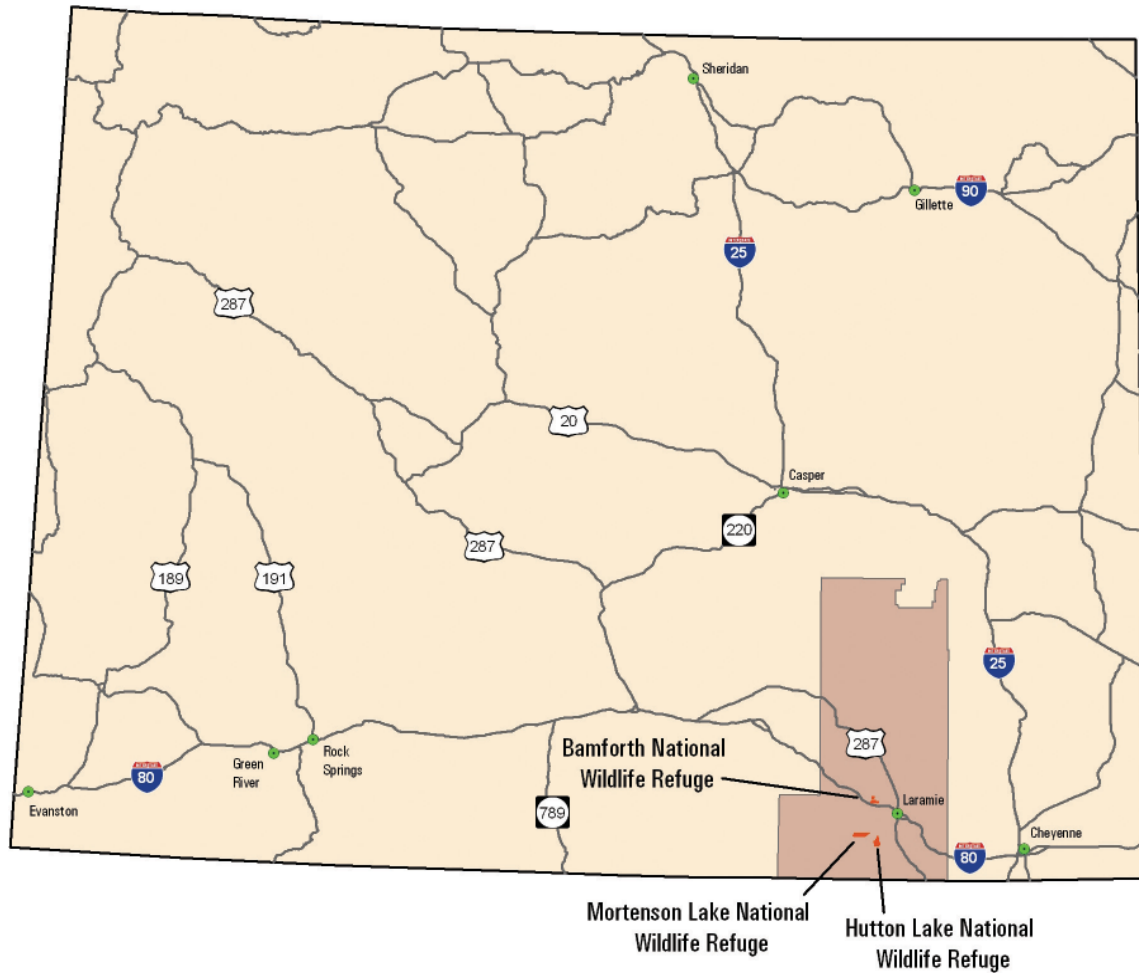
The planning process and public involvement are further described in “The Planning Process” section of this chapter.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

The purpose of this CCP is to identify the role that the refuges will play in support of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System), and to provide long-term guidance for management of refuge programs and activities. The CCP is needed

- to communicate with the public and other partners in efforts to carry out the mission of the Refuge System;
- to provide a clear statement of direction for management of the refuges;
- to provide neighbors, visitors, and government officials with an understanding of the Service’s management actions on and around the refuges;
- to ensure that the Service’s management actions are consistent with the mandates of the Improvement Act;

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



Region 6 Mountain - Prairie Region

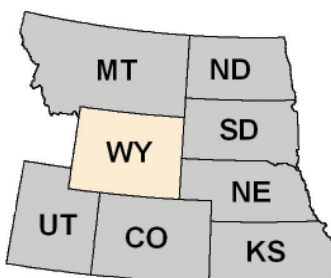


Figure 1. Vicinity map for the Laramie Plains refuges, Wyoming.

- to ensure that management of the refuges is consistent with federal, state, and county plans;
- to provide a basis for development of budget requests for the refuges' operation, maintenance, and capital improvement needs.

THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AND THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The Service is the principal federal agency responsible for fish, wildlife, and plant conservation. The Refuge System is one of the Service's major programs.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working with others, is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

Over a century ago, America's fish and wildlife resources were declining at an alarming rate. Concerned citizens, scientists, and hunting and angling groups joined together to restore and sustain America's national wildlife heritage. This was the genesis of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Today, the Service enforces federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores vital wildlife habitat, protects and recovers endangered species, and helps other governments with conservation efforts. In addition, the Service administers a federal aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars to states for fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, and related programs across America.

National Wildlife Refuge System

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt designated the 5.5-acre Pelican Island in Florida as the nation's first wildlife refuge for the protection of brown pelicans and other native, nesting birds. This small but significant designation was the beginning of the Refuge System.

One hundred years later, the Refuge System has become the largest network of lands in the world specifically managed for wildlife, encompassing over 96 million acres within 546 refuges and over 3,000 small areas for waterfowl breeding and nesting. Today, there is at least one refuge in every state as well as Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In 1997, the Improvement Act established a clear mission for the Refuge System.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

The Improvement Act states that each national wildlife refuge (that is, each unit of the Refuge System) shall be managed

- to fulfill the mission of the Refuge System;
- to fulfill the individual purposes of each refuge;
- to consider the needs of fish and wildlife first;
- to fulfill the requirement of developing a CCP for each unit of the Refuge System and fully involve the public in the preparation of these plans;
- to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System;
- to recognize that wildlife-dependent recreation activities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, are legitimate and priority public uses;
- to retain the authority of refuge managers to determine compatible public uses.

In addition to the mission for the Refuge System, the wildlife and habitat vision for each unit of the Refuge System stresses the following principles:

- Wildlife comes first.
- Ecosystems, biodiversity, and wilderness are vital concepts in refuge and district management.
- Habitats must be healthy.
- Growth of refuges and wetland management districts must be strategic.
- The Refuge System serves as a model for habitat management with broad participation from others.

Following passage of the Improvement Act, the Service immediately began to carry out the direction of the new legislation, including preparation of CCPs for all national wildlife refuges and wetland management districts. Consistent with the Improvement Act, the Service prepares all CCPs in

conjunction with public involvement. Each refuge and each district is required to complete its CCP within the 15-year schedule (by 2012).

People and the Refuge System

The nation's fish and wildlife heritage contributes to the quality of American lives. Wildlife and wild places provide special opportunities to recreate, relax, and enjoy the natural world.

Whether through bird watching, fishing, hunting, photography, or other wildlife pursuits, wildlife recreation contributes millions of dollars to local economies. In 2002, approximately 35.5 million people visited the Refuge System, mostly to observe wildlife in their natural habitats. Visitors are most often accommodated through nature trails, auto tours, interpretive programs, and hunting and fishing opportunities. Significant economic benefits are being generated to the local communities that surround refuges and wetland management districts. Economists report that Refuge System visitors contribute more than \$792 million annually to local economies.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL MANDATES

Refuge System units are managed to achieve the mission and goals of the Refuge System, along with the designated purpose of the refuges and districts (as described in establishing legislation, executive orders, or other establishing documents). Key concepts and guidance of the Refuge System are in the Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (Administration Act), Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs), "The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual," and the Improvement Act.

The Improvement Act amends the Administration Act by providing a unifying mission for the Refuge System, a new process for determining compatible public uses on refuges and districts, and a requirement that each refuge and district be managed under a CCP. The Improvement Act states that wildlife conservation is the priority of Refuge System lands and that the Secretary of the Interior will ensure the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of refuge lands are maintained. Each refuge and district must be managed to fulfill the Refuge System's mission and the specific purposes for which it was established. The Improvement Act requires the Service to monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge and district.

A detailed description of these and other laws and executive orders that may affect the CCP or the Service's implementation of the CCP is in appendix A. Service policies on planning and day-to-day

management of refuges and districts are in the "Refuge System Manual" and "The Fish and Wildlife Service Manual."

REFUGE CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PLANS

The Laramie Plains refuges contribute to the conservation efforts described here.

Fulfilling the Promise

A 1999 report, "Fulfilling the Promise, The National Wildlife Refuge System" (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 1999), is the culmination of a yearlong process by teams of Service employees to evaluate the Refuge System nationwide. This report was the focus of the first national Refuge System conference in 1998 attended by refuge managers, other Service employees, and representatives from leading conservation organizations.

The report contains 42 recommendations packaged with three vision statements dealing with wildlife and habitat, people, and leadership. This CCP deals with all three of these major topics. The planning team looked to the recommendations in the document for guidance during CCP planning.

Partners in Flight

The Partners in Flight program began in 1990 with the recognition of declining population levels of many migratory bird species. The challenge, according to the program, is managing human population growth while maintaining functional natural ecosystems. To meet this challenge, Partners in Flight worked to establish priorities for conservation efforts and identify land bird species and habitat types. Partners in Flight activity has resulted in 52 bird conservation plans covering the continental United States.

The primary goal of Partners in Flight is to provide for the long-term health of the bird life of North America. The first priority is to prevent the rarest species from going extinct, the second is to prevent uncommon species from descending into threatened status, and the third is to "keep common birds common."

There are 58 physiographic areas, defined by similar physical geographic features, wholly or partially contained within the contiguous United States and several others wholly or partially in Alaska. The Laramie Plains refuges fall within physiographic area 86, the Wyoming Basin (see figure 2).

The Wyoming Basin is primarily in Wyoming but also extends into northern Colorado, southern Montana, and very small parts of northeast Utah and southeast Idaho. The area consists of broad intermountain basins interrupted by isolated hills and low mountains that merge to the south into a dissected plateau. The Wyoming Basin is primarily shrub-steppe habitat, dominated by sagebrush and shadscale, interspersed with areas of short-grass prairie. Higher elevations are in mountain shrub vegetation, with coniferous forest atop the highest areas. Priority bird populations and habitats of the Wyoming Basin include the following:

Shrub-Steppe

Ferruginous hawk
Prairie falcon
Greater sage-grouse
Cassin's kingbird
Sage thrasher
Brewer's sparrow
Sage sparrow

Sagebrush Grasslands

Swainson's hawk
Mountain plover
McCowan's longspur

Montane Shrub

Lewis's woodpecker
Virginia's warbler

Wetlands

American white pelican
Wilson's phalarope

Recovery Plans for Federally Listed Threatened or Endangered Species

Where federally listed threatened or endangered species occur at the Laramie Plains refuges, management goals and strategies in their respective recovery plans will be followed. The list of threatened or endangered species that occur at the refuges will change as species are listed or delisted, or as listed species are discovered on refuge lands.

At the time of plan approval, the Wyoming Toad Recovery Plan (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 1991) is in effect at Mortenson Lake NWR, the only refuge covered by this CCP that provides habitat for the endangered Wyoming toad. Reports of Preble's meadow jumping mouse have been documented at Hutton Lake NWR. The Service conducted a biological evaluation of the actions in this CCP per section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (see appendix M).

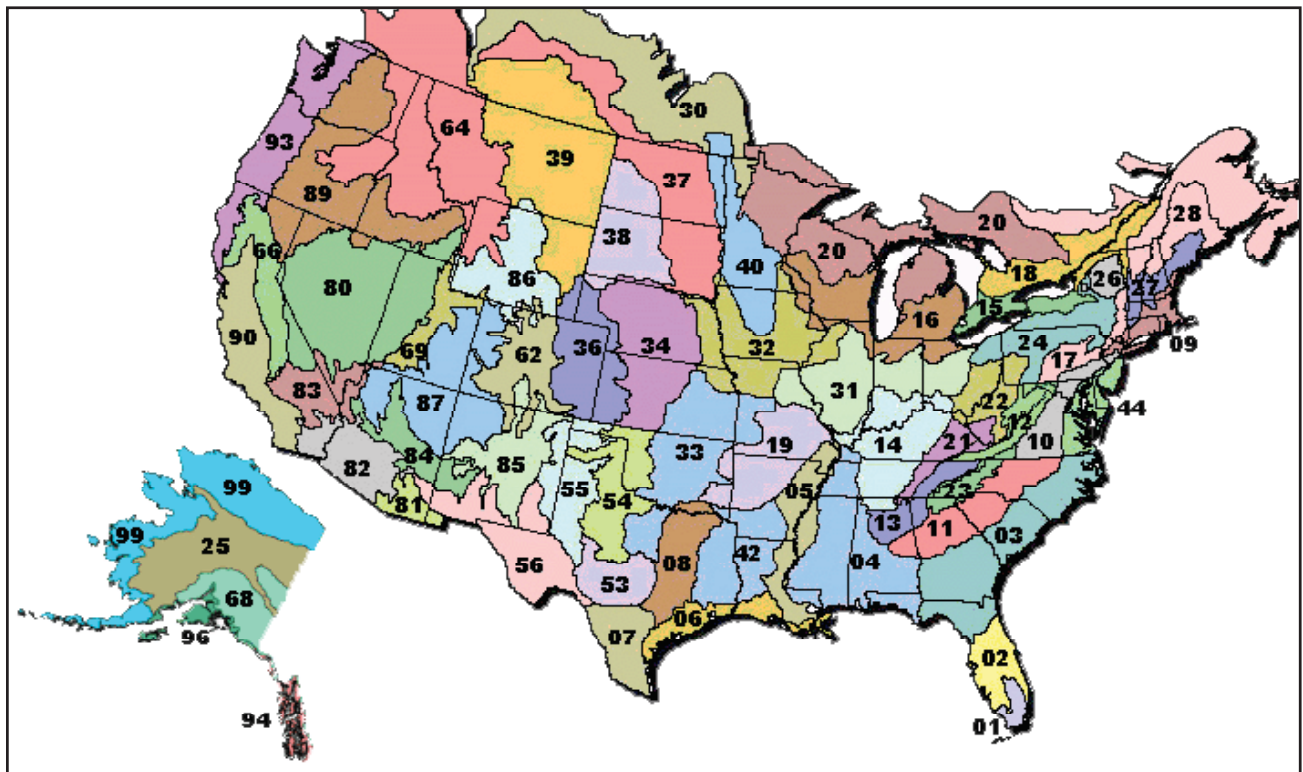


Figure 2. The Laramie Plains refuges are located in the Wyoming Basin, physiographic area 86.

State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Over the past several decades, documented declines of wildlife populations have occurred nationwide. Congress created the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) program in 2001. This program provides states and territories with federal dollars to support conservation aimed at preventing wildlife from becoming endangered and in need of protection under the Endangered Species Act. The SWG program represents an ambitious endeavor to take a proactive role in keeping species from becoming threatened or endangered in the future.

According to the SWG program, each state or territory and the District of Columbia must complete a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy (CWCS) by October 1, 2005, to receive future funding.

The CWCS for the state of Wyoming was reviewed and information therein was used during the development of the CCP. Implementation of CCP habitat goals and objectives will support the goals and objectives of the CWCS.

ECOSYSTEM DESCRIPTION AND THREATS

The Laramie Plains refuges are located within the Platte–Kansas Rivers ecosystem, which includes almost all of Nebraska, southeast Wyoming, northeast Colorado, and northern Kansas (figure 3). The ecosystem is home to the Nebraska Sandhills, the largest sand dune complex in the western hemisphere. This area and many others provide vital habitat for numerous threatened and endangered wildlife and plant species.

The ecosystem spans from snow-capped, barren mountain peaks in Colorado to lowland riparian cottonwood forests along the Missouri River in eastern Nebraska and Kansas. The mountainous regions are predominately a mixture of coniferous forests comprised of Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, and subalpine fir. Pinyon pine, juniper woodlands, and aspen communities are also common throughout. At high elevation, alpine meadows and lakes, willow shrub lands, and barren, rocky areas are frequently found. Forests generally transition into shrub communities dominated by sagebrush with short grasses and forbs in eastern Wyoming and western Nebraska. Farther to the east, trees give way to short-grass prairie dominated by buffalo grass, blue grama, hairy grama, and western wheatgrass. The short-grass prairie turns into mixed-grass prairie in central Nebraska and Kansas, due primarily to greater annual rainfall. Many federally listed endangered and threatened species including the

bald eagle, piping plover, whooping crane, and Eskimo curlew are found within this ecosystem. Threats to the Platte–Kansas Rivers ecosystem that require attention include overgrazing of land, invasive plants in the area, population growth and housing development, and groundwater and surface-water depletion. To overcome these threats, the priorities for the ecosystem will be to ensure that natural, healthy ecological processes dominate and that economic development complements environmental protection.

Refuge Relationship

The Laramie Plains refuges lie within the Laramie Basin. The Laramie Basin is at an elevation of between 7,200 and 7,500 feet above sea level; it is a semiarid, intermountain basin characterized by a predominant vegetation of short grasses and sagebrush.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

This CCP for the three Laramie Plains refuges is intended to comply with the Improvement Act and the NEPA as well as the implementing regulations of the acts. The Service issued its Refuge System planning policy in 2000, which established requirements and guidance for refuge and district plans—including CCPs and step-down management plans—to ensure that planning efforts comply with the Improvement Act. The planning policy identifies several steps of the CCP and EA process (also see figure 4):

- Form a planning team and conduct preplanning.
- Initiate public involvement and scoping.
- Draft the vision statement and goals.
- Develop and analyze alternatives, including the proposed action.
- Prepare the draft CCP and EA.
- Prepare and adopt the final CCP and EA and issue a “finding of no significant impact” (FONSI) or determine if an environmental impact statement is needed.
- Implement the CCP; monitor and evaluate.
- Review the CCP every 5 years and revise it every 15 years.

The Service began the preplanning process in January 2006. The planning team consisted of Service personnel from various divisions including refuges, planning, education and visitor services, ecological services, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. A list of planning team members and

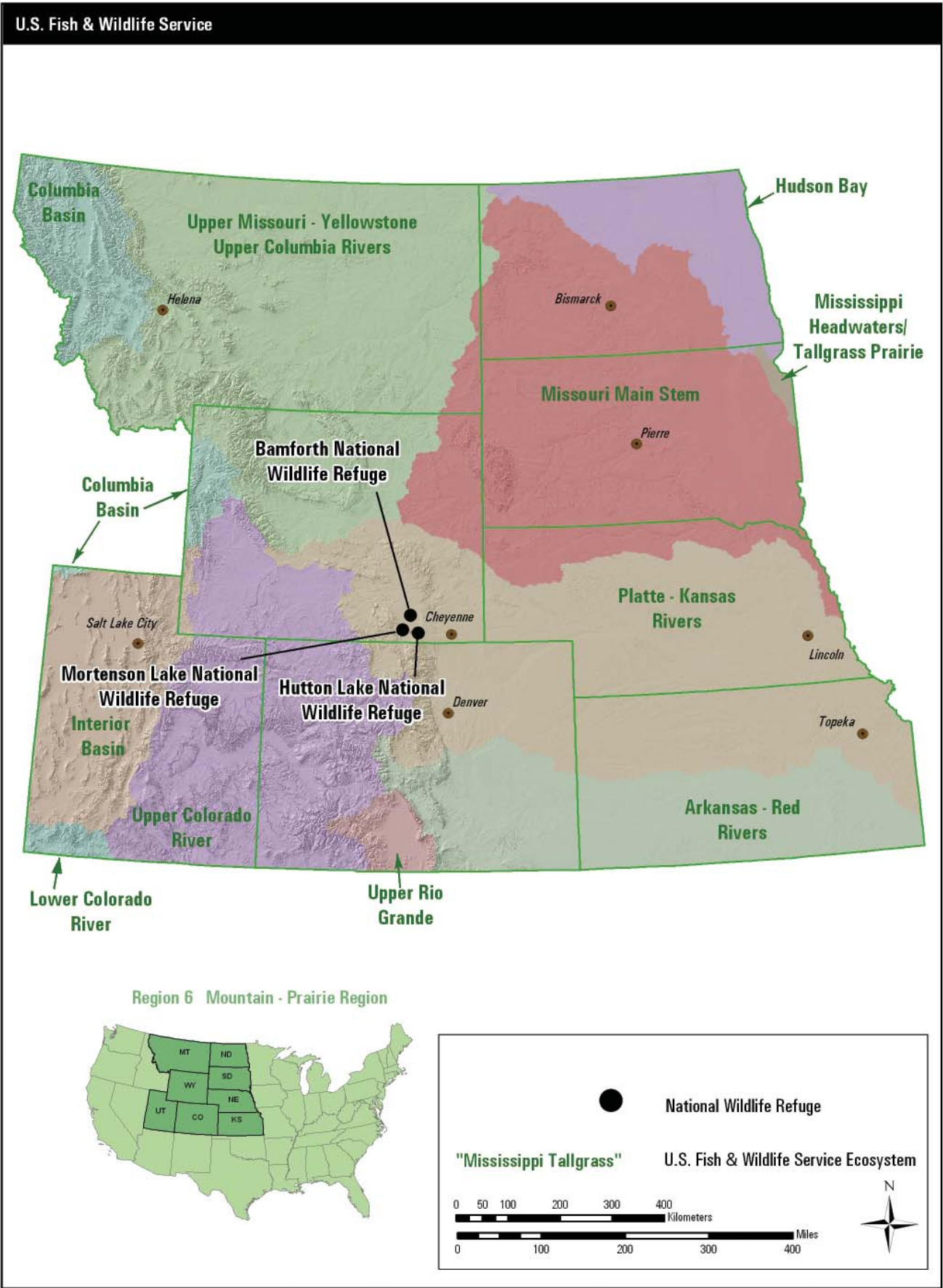


Figure 3. Platte–Kansas Rivers ecosystem.

other major contributors to the development of this CCP is in appendix C.

The Service developed three unique management alternatives based on the issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed during the scoping process.

The evaluation of the alternatives was documented in “Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment—Bamforth National Wildlife Refuge, Hutton Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Mortenson Lake National Wildlife Refuge,” which was published in August 2007. After the public comment period for the draft CCP and EA, the Service finalized the CCP.

Coordination with the Public

The Service held two public scoping meetings in May 2006 (see table 1 for details) announced by the local media. During the public meetings, a description of the CCP and NEPA process was provided. Participants were asked to provide suggestions on the scope of issues to be considered in the planning process, and comments were recorded and entered in the planning record. Attendees were encouraged to ask questions and offer comments; each attendee was given a comment form to submit additional thoughts or questions in writing.

Approximately 51 people attended the public meetings. Attendees included local citizens and members of the Laramie Audubon Society, the Wyoming Outdoor Council, and the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance.

Written comments were due July 17, 2006. A total of 70 written comments were received throughout the scoping process. Input obtained from meetings and correspondence including email was considered in development of this draft CCP and EA.

A mailing list of more than 148 contacts includes private citizens; local, regional, and state government representatives and legislators; other federal agencies; and interested organizations (see appendix D).

In September 2006, the first planning update was sent to everyone on the mailing list. Information was provided on the history of the refuges and the CCP process, along with an invitation to share ideas regarding refuge management with the planning team. Each planning update included a comment form and postage-paid envelope to give the public an opportunity to provide written comments.

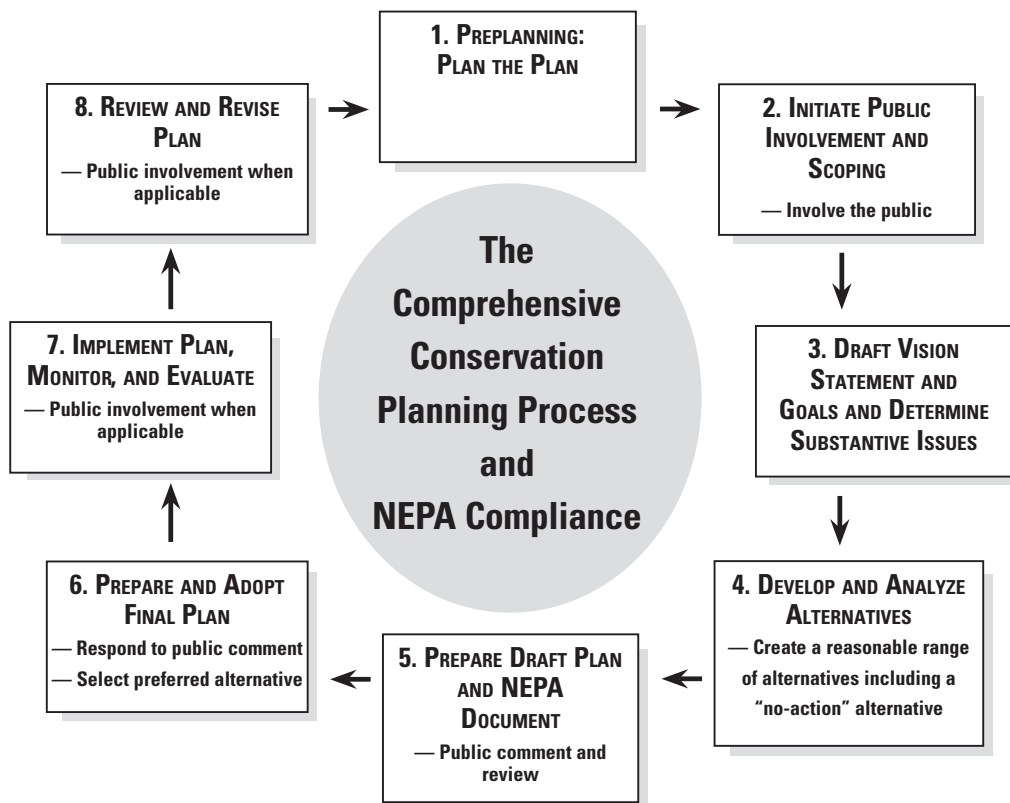


Figure 4. The planning process.

State Coordination

On January 27, 2006, an invitation letter to participate in the CCP process was sent by the Service's region 6 director to the director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGF). Two representatives from the WGF are part of the CCP planning team. Local WGF wildlife biologists and the refuge staff had established excellent and ongoing working relations before starting the CCP process.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is charged with providing “an adequate and flexible system for the control, management, protection, and regulation of all Wyoming wildlife.” The WGF maintains 36 Wildlife Habitat Management Areas and 96 Public Access Areas, encompassing 410,000 acres of managed lands for wildlife habitat and public recreation opportunity. These lands contain 121 miles of stream easements and about 21,014 surface acres of lakes and reservoirs for public access.

Tribal Coordination

On October 17, 2006, five Native American tribal governments (Arapaho, Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Oglala Sioux, and Shoshone) were contacted

through a letter signed by Service's region 6 director. With information about the upcoming CCP, the letter invited tribal recipients to serve on the planning team. Although Native American tribal governments did not express interest in participating on the planning team, the tribal governments remain on the CCP mailing list and will continue to receive CCP correspondence.

Results of Scoping

Table 1 summarizes all scoping activities. Comments collected from scoping meetings and correspondence, including comment forms, were used in the development of a final list of issues that were addressed in the draft CCP and EA.

The Service determined which alternatives could best address these issues. The planning process ensures that issues with the greatest effect on the refuges are resolved or given priority over the life of the final CCP. Identified issues, along with a discussion of effects on resources, are summarized in chapter 2.

In addition, the Service considered suggested changes to current refuge management presented by the public and other groups.

Table 1. Planning process summary for the Laramie Plains refuges, Wyoming.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
January–March 2006	Preplanning.	CCP overview; established planning team; identified purpose of the refuges, history, and establishing authority; developed planning schedule and CCP mailing list.
March 23, 2006	Kickoff meeting.	Toured refuges; conducted internal scoping by developing issues and qualities list for the refuges; identified biological and mapping needs; developed a vision statement for the refuges.
May 8, 2006	News release for public meeting sent to Wyoming media contacts.	Notified public of opportunities for involvement in the CCP process.
May 24, 2006	Public meeting in Casper, WY.	Opportunity for the public to learn about the CCP and offer suggestions on the scope of issues to be considered in the planning process.
May 25, 2006	Public meeting in Laramie, WY.	Opportunity for the public to learn about the CCP and offer suggestions on the scope of issues to be considered in the planning process.
June 16, 2006	NOI (to prepare the CCP) published in the “Federal Register.”	Notified the public of the intention to prepare a CCP and EA for the Laramie Plains refuges.
July 27, 2006	Goals and alternatives workshop.	Goals developed; alternatives discussed.
September 2006	Planning update distributed to CCP mailing list.	Planning update (describing CCP process and providing opportunity for public suggestions on the scope of issues to be considered in the planning process).
September 26, 2006	Environmental consequences workshop and identification of the proposed action.	Reviewed the anticipated environmental consequences; identified alternative B as the proposed action.
October 20, 2006	Objectives workshop.	Reviewed the proposed objectives, strategies, and rationale for implementation of the proposed action (draft CCP).
June 2007	Internal review of the draft CCP and EA.	Received comments on the draft CCP and EA.
August 2007	Release of draft CCP and EA for public review.	Draft CCP and EA presented to the public; received comments on the revised draft CCP and EA.
August 29, 2007	Public meeting in Laramie, WY.	Increased public understanding of the draft CCP and EA; received public comments on the draft CCP and EA.
September 2007	CCP approval.	Selection of the preferred alternative (B) for the final CCP.